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Flash Archiving the Writing Center: Snapshots from Lebanon and Egypt

Abstract

Composition studies in general, and writing center studies in particular, have developed an increasingly fulsome conversation about archives. Excellent recent work on the theory and practice of creating archives establishes best practices and rationales. Building especially on Stacy Nall (2014), we introduce "flash archiving" as a term and practice for what we call "good-enough archiving," an entry-point approach to archiving for harried writing center administrators and staff. Flash archiving mirrors the knowledge-making that is the de facto outcome of writing center practice: attuned to ephemera in the midst of solving real-world writing dilemmas. The notion of flash archiving arises from our work as writing center administrators in Lebanon and Egypt and offers a less-than-perfect but nonetheless quite viable way of getting a snapshot of writing centers' relational work. Because community engagement is central to the meaning-making practices of writing centers, we trace out the logic for and practical uses of flash archiving as a way of capturing the relational "nonevents" that typify such engagement. The result is a form of knowledge-making and collective self-fashioning attuned to the constitutive vagaries of writing center work.

Archive Trouble

Archives are logistically and conceptually troublesome. Writing centers (and writing programs) produce endless archivable moments and materials. What is to be kept, and how is it to be accessed and made useful? Though nearly all writing program administrators agree on the necessity of archives, many administrators lack time and have trouble creating and using archives effectively. Small wonder: most of us are not archivists! Having no archives at all, though, or having archives responsive primarily to external communication demands, brings troubles all its own. The histories we make, or make the materials for making, are to a large extent who we are. This essay does not purport to resolve a dilemma, but rather offers resources developed within the space of that dilemma. We suggest an approach to archiving—flash archiving—that situates the self-making of writing centers in our community relations. Throughout, we articulate a vision of flash archiving as an imperfect way of catching hold of the life of writing programs, and especially of community engagement experiences. Flash archiving is a kind of mesolevel approach to capturing the data of everyday life, more immediately usable than the microdetails of a truly extensive archive and closer to lived experience than the macroscale of the report to upper administrators and other institutional stakeholders. It is a way of archiving that, though impressionistic rather than exhaustive, casts forward threads of continuity and possibility even when collaborations or community engagements fail. Flash archiving grew out of our work as writing center administrators in Lebanon and Egypt, pursuing ambitious community programs with deeply limited resources.

Archiving presents a particular dilemma for writing center directors because of the logistical and theoretical structure of writing centers, the nature of the work done in and with them, and their peculiar political positioning within institutions. A writing center is almost by definition an in-between place, a community of practice both ephemeral and abiding. As Anne Ellen Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, & Elizabeth H. Boquet (2006) note in their compelling extension of Etienne Wenger-Trayner's (1998) coinage, such communities of practice balance "reification (as produced by texts, procedural manuals, and policy statements) and participation in our writing centers […] by taking advantage of our unique position in our institutions, a position that gives us the freedom to go into the liminal spaces" (pp. 21–22). Each center negotiates for its firm place in outward-directed institutional and logistical conversations. At the same time, each center arises in fleeting interactions between writers, made of moments that by their nature escape capture. To be useful, the writing center must be such a space of both liminal possibility and institutional reification, a Wengerian community of practice. Writing centers help writers write with writers, often a profound opening of

personal identity for both sides of the dyad; and centers create an identity for themselves by successfully playing institutional language games that capture characteristic activities in quantitative measures and highly specified genres of writing.

In introducing flash archiving as an approach that has been useful for two writing centers in the Middle East, at the American University of Beirut and the American University in Cairo, our aim is twofold: on the one hand, we offer the concept and practices of flash archiving as a negotiation of important recent work by Stacy Nall (2014) and others. On the other hand, we are interested in the question of *how and what relational knowledge is made* by archiving writing center relationships. After engaging with the trouble and necessity of archiving relationship-building in the writing center, we offer a theoretical and practical framework for developing such archives and explore what this has looked like at our writing centers. The snapshots created through our own flash archiving are followed by some epistemological reflections. What is at stake for writing center knowledge-making, we ask, in creating relational archives, and how can flash archiving help us to do so deliberately, efficiently, and frugally?

Writing center archives need to be useful for negotiating the interstitial space that centers occupy: between the institutional imperative of producing results and the rolling sequences of "nonevents," to borrow Ann Laura Stoler's (2010) term, that comprise writing centers' everyday knowledge-making. Stoler's *Along the Archival Grain* (2010) is a powerful meditation on the uses and abuses of archives under colonialism and for postcolonial scholarship. Defined by Stoler as "records of things that never happened," nonevents are moments not central to historiographic accounts since they are considered of "little consequence" and thus not worthy of such accounts or of archival recording (p. 5).[1] Nonevents occur without quite happening, without pressing themselves into any official register, even that of ordinary memory. And the drumbeat of nonevents makes writing centers tick even more than other institutional spaces: impossible-to-capture instants of connection between writers, flashes of possibility for pieces of writing and lives, openings within closed domains. Nonevents are central to the relational flow of writing centers, as communities where intentional meaning-making is practiced without always resulting in products. Nonevents do not leave well-defined historiographic traces in, say,

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1   Lebanon and Egypt each have complex—and radically disparate—colonial and postcolonial histories that would beggar any brief overview. The interested non-specialist might start with Andrew Arsan's *Lebanon: A Country in Fragments* (2018) and Leila Ahmed's reflective *A Border Passage* (2012). On the general construct of "the Middle East," which we use uneasily in this essay, see especially Michael E. Bonine, Abbas Amanat, & Michael Ezekiel Gasper's edited collection *Is There a Middle East?* (2012). Where Stoler excavates the nonevents of the colonial archive, we suggest here a strategy for archiving these explicitly, no less useful for the metropole than for the supposed periphery.

annual reports to the president and provost—even as making sense of them is the self-reflection whereby a writing center knows and makes itself over time.[2] Flash archiving reifies some such moments in the service of that reflexive and relational self-making.

Consider the following record of a nonevent produced through our own practice of flash archiving, which lays bare in some sense the heart of the writing center:

> When the American University of Beirut writing center director reached out to the Migrant Community Center's (MCC) general coordinator, Rami Shukr, it was to see if the writing center might be useful in organizing literacy workshops relevant to the needs of the migrant workers served by MCC, and to suggest that the staff of the center could run tutoring sessions for the writers and editors of their newsletter. . . A key moment of interaction between the team and MCC was when Shukr helped us see that many MCC participants lacked basic literacies in their first languages, let alone in English. This required that we revise the entire strategy and approach to the type of work the tutors would be collaborating on.

While this moment can, now that it exists in writing, be captured in institutional assessment and reporting, this sort of reflection does not fit neatly anywhere. After all, the collaboration referenced petered out after less than a year. It was not a "sustainable success," not good fodder for the president's annual message to donors. Yet, in the development of that center, of its tutors' writing, and of our identities as scholars living in and working on a world beyond the university, this moment—one of many thousands of such moments that make up the life of a writing center in any given year—mattered.

Any future director of the writing center at the American University of Beirut needs a sense of at least some of those past moments since each sequence of nonevents defines a very different sort of community than every other. And such a sense is not readily gleaned from the largely quantitative reports we duly file, or even from quick narratives of our accomplishments. Above all else, a writing center is a place for the possibility of new connections: between thoughts and words, between writers, and between the university and the larger world. Flash archiving establishes the possibility of sharing failures, friction, and difficulties as well as successes—where new ventures do not take hold at one moment, they may at another, but even more, the parade of such

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2   We recognize an important linkage to feminist archival theory, particularly the role of the archivist as self-consciously reflexive producer of (self-)knowledge. We hope in future work to explore ties between flash archiving and, for instance, texts by Cheryl Glenn & Jessica Enoch (2009) or Thomas P. Miller & Joseph G. Jones (2005) on archiving as embodied and institutionally emplaced and so also collective self-fashioning.

"occurring but not happening" moments is the specific character of any given writing center over and above its well registered histories.

Let us follow this narrative of the American University of Beirut's collaboration with the MCC a moment longer:

> Keeping in mind David Bartholomae's (1986) notion that marginalized writers best join discourse communities if we flexibly help in reinventing the university situation wherever writing is involved, the team talked with Shukr about how best to help move migrant workers into more empowered positions in the community (particularly difficult because Lebanon in general, and its capitol in particular, comprise a mélange of languages—Arabic, English, French, and more—and because many migrant workers face high levels of racism and personal privation). Coming out of that conversation, we began working together on a testimonials project whereby the writing center would be offering workshops guiding workers/writers to find their voices and create their own testimonials. However, after the workshops and the testimonials project, and for reasons outside both parties' immediate control, the collaboration fell through and was not pursued in later years.

Why did the collaboration fall through? Our narrative cannot say. What is made available here is not a clean causal chain, or even a complete story. This is a quick image, not a 3D rendering. What flash archiving allows for is only the collection of writing center snapshots. No individual snapshot is the story of a center. Yet in the aggregate, moments of submission to greater forces and moments of joyous invention of new possibilities, and so many more besides, offer a felt sense of not only what, but also *who* and *how* a writing center has been.

Positioned somewhere between the autoarchiving of email communication (which often reflects institutional imperatives) and the multifarious ephemerality of writing tutoring itself, archiving can be at once an administratively reifying and a collaboratively freeing epistemic tool. This essay suggests a way of moving forward usefully, without resolution of the difficulty archives present for writing centers. Effective archiving is time-consuming, and archives are not always shared when leadership transitions occur. Whether analogue or digital, archives can occupy large spaces and impose a nontrivial organizational burden. The collection of symbolic artifacts produced in a writing center over any significant span of time is prodigious. Moreover, many of the most important elements of writing center work—the delicate latticework of human relationships and interactions that make our work possible, the nonevents of it all—tend to get lost in the process. This is especially so for community engagement work, a natural extension of the collaborative cultures that writing centers perpetuate.

And it is in documenting relational elements of our engagement work beyond the writing center, both within and outside our campus communities, that we have found flash archiving most crucial. We understand "engagement" here as an extension of Linda Bergmann's (2010) articulation:

> ongoing, important work, valuable not only as a teaching tool (as in "service learning"), but also as an extension relationship, which has for generations been associated with fostering scientific and scholarly research, applying it in the community (to business, government, and nonprofit organizations, as appropriate), bringing resources into the university, and offering the university's resources to a wider community. (p. 162)

While the community to be engaged differs widely across centers and institutions, engagement for us involves the exchange of experiences and knowledge in the context of writing center practice. As a "practical endeavor for a writing center," community engagement "increases our knowledge and understanding as well as those of our partners, clients, and collaborators outside of the university" (Bergmann, 2010, p. 162). Community engagement, broadly understood to extend to the campus community as well as the community external to campus, is one of the primary ways of being-in-the-world for writing centers everywhere. For writing centers in the intensely relational Middle East, it is a *sine qua non*.

While not all writing centers have the resources or ability to initiate and sustain community relationships within or outside their institutions, the very structure and rationale of writing centers encourages the development of such projects (Bergmann, 2010). However, these projects involve a great deal of relationship-building, not all of which bears fruit or marks pivotal moments in an eventual history of the writing center (see Grimm, 1999; Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet, 2006; Grimm, 2008; Bergmann, 2010; and Miley, 2017). The meaning-making work of the writing center, encoded as it is in practical, disciplinary, institutional, and conceptual knowledges of writing together, is accomplished relationally. But relations are archival nonevents, material flows that leave few readily decipherable marks.

To archive our work well is to make meaningful space for a great many such nonevents, and at once to reify less of our shared experience than the digital world allows. We need archives large enough to get at our characteristic activities, nonevents included, but small enough to be readily understood and accessed by human beings, by ourselves and writing center administrators and tutors to come. If this is true for decades-old writing centers, it is more so for younger centers and centers in development, especially those outside the traditional Anglosphere of writing center work. In a collaboration between the writing centers at the American University of Beirut and the American University in Cairo, it became clear that one of our greatest shared needs was for a sustainable, time-efficient approach to archiving community en-

gagement. We needed a way of keeping track of our emerging relationships, many of which faltered or gave way entirely, in a way that could readily serve in projects of institution-building/-maintaining. As our earlier vignette suggests, community engagement can be resource-intensive without always producing institutionally useful narratives. Understanding and building the character of a writing center may entail special attention precisely to those relationships that do not immediately bear fruit. At the same time, in an era of austerity and great difficulties for higher education worldwide, crafting archives that allow for rebuilding and renovation of programs—but that are not unduly time- or resource-intensive to create—is ever more crucial.

Rather than suggest a universal, one-size-fits-all approach to archiving, this essay locates flash archiving in its context of origin, as a suggestive basis for other local inventions of archiving process. Developed as a way of keeping track of community engagement work at the centers of two rather different universities in the Middle East,[3] the practice reflects and illuminates particularities of its dual context. At the same time, flash archiving *is* a more broadly suggestive sort of approach. We are hardly the first to observe a need for archival practices that help the often harried faculty and staff administering centers and other writing programs to name and track efficiently the many interpersonal engagements that make up our work.[4] In presenting flash archiving as a sustainable strategy for building writing center archives, we share lessons drawn from using that strategy at our own centers. At the same time, we argue that, as a mesolevel practice of capturing the flow of relations, flash archiving speaks to the relational structure of knowledge-making everywhere entailed, whether self-consciously or not, by practices of negotiating writing together. Writing center knowledge-making is, from tutor training and writing consultations to administrative reports, the productive reification of relational ephemera. Flash archiving aims to capture enough such ephemera to be practically and epistemically useful.

The American University of Beirut and the American University in Cairo: Two Models

In the past two decades, writing centers have proliferated throughout the Middle East, following several different models of operation and inform-

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3   Both the American University of Beirut and the American University in Cairo, while having different histories, were founded by Americans as private, English-language, liberal arts institutions; both are accredited within their home countries and by US-based agencies.

4   The need for sustainable archiving practices has been increasingly recognized, such as by Tarez Samra Graban, Alexis Ramsey-Tobienne, & Whitney Myers (2015); Roger Austen (2018); and Molly Tetreault, Patty Wilde, & Sarah B. Franco (2019). And yet, some question remains as to what we should take "sustainable" to entail.

ing a variety of conversations.[5] Rula Diab (2017) notes this multigenesis in her foreword to *Emerging Writing Research from the Middle East North Africa Region*. In that edited collection, writing scholarship is discussed in terms of complicating prevalent assumptions, negotiating Western models, and striving for balance across borders. Situated in a multicultural, multilingual context, Middle Eastern writing centers negotiate the status of English as not a home language for many tutors and writers by developing models that adapt disciplinary constraints to language needs within culturally and institutionally specific frameworks.

The American University of Beirut (AUB) is the oldest English-medium liberal arts university in Lebanon. Now entering its seventeenth year at the university, the writing center comprises both the writing center itself and a writing-in-the-disciplines program. As an academic support unit, it works directly with undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff on developing rhetorical competencies at all levels. In coordination with General Education, the writing center collaborates with faculty members, departments, and other academic support programs to designate, design, and facilitate faculty senate-mandated writing-in-the-disciplines courses throughout AUB. The center offers individual tutoring consultations for writers in the AUB community (around 2,100 appointments per academic year for a student body of 9,000 during the 2016–2017 academic year when this process was being developed). The center also leads graduate and undergraduate workshops on writing and conducts writing- and tutoring-related research. For more on AUB's writing center, see Erin Zimmerman & Emma Moghabghab (2020).

In response to the need for outreach both on campus and off, and as part of general efforts to deepen impact, the AUB center made community engagement a top priority starting in 2015–2016. Off-campus collaborations have included work with other university writing centers including The American University in Cairo, high school writing centers, nongovernmental organizations, and the United Nations. Lebanon is suffering a refugee crisis of unprecedented proportions—still ongoing as the Syrian civil war bleeds on, though overshadowed in recent years by a horrific financial crisis, the explosion at the Beirut port, and revolutionary stirrings; therefore, the writing center was particularly invested in developing partnerships with nongovernmental organizations and the United Nations when we began this work.

The American University in Cairo (AUC) is an English-medium university located in Egypt, an at-once regionally similar but profoundly different institution and context. AUC has two campuses: the original campus

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5   For a recent overview of writing centers in the Middle East and North Africa today, see Amy Hodges, Lynne Ronesi, and Amy Zenger (2019). [Eds.: Some writing center founding years for this region are also included in the timeline at the beginning of this *WCJ* issue.]

in the heart of the capitol's downtown and the new campus, established more recently, on its outskirts. AUC's Writing and Communication Center began as a writing support unit and later evolved to a full-fledged writing center. The center has a director and a tutoring staff composed of graduate fellows, faculty from the Department of Rhetoric and Composition and the English Language Institute, and adjuncts with TESOL backgrounds. AUC's writing center serves around 950 graduate and undergraduate students from 35 disciplines each year, drawing from a student population of 6,650. The center also offers tutoring in Arabic and has a dedicated tutor to provide support for public speaking classes twice a week.

For security reasons, AUC's community partners are all on-campus. In the 2015–2016 academic year, our focus for the flash archiving shared in this essay, AUC's writing center was working primarily with various schools, offices, and academies at the university. By providing a series of custom-designed workshops for these schools and offices, the writing center was able to provide academic support for undergraduates and graduate students in ways that continually expanded the scope of its mission. At AUC's center, community engagement has often also meant learning from others on campus. To provide support for students with disabilities, for instance, the director of the writing center invited staff members from the Office of Student Well-Being to speak to tutors during training sessions. For both AUB and AUC, relationally supportive strategies have been crucial in navigating periods of national institutional crisis. As higher education worldwide enters a prolonged renewal of longstanding crises, partially resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, lessons from these contexts may be especially valuable elsewhere as well.

Making Archives, Making Writing Centers

Time and again, a writing center finds itself in a position to justify its funding and other support by bringing forth evidence of work and results achieved. Joyce Kinkead (2017) argues that writing centers can make this work "more visible through artifacts that document experiences and that can be housed in archives for future researchers and scholars" (p. 10). In this context, Kinkead (2017) is referring to institutional history and archives, "stories of writing centers—the lore—as well as qualitative and quantitative research" (p. 10). For writing program administrators in general, however, as Christy Desmet (2005) among others has argued, "traces of conversations, committee meetings, and bitter struggles" get lost in the institutional stories we tell (p. 48). As Desmet notes, "What artifacts persist in a writing program record the force of individual personalities on the writing curriculum but are silent on the collaborative, combative, and negotiated processes that inform the underlife of academic institutions" (p. 48). A writing center's interiority across time is

shaped by its archives. Especially in the absence of stable longterm leadership or constituted institutional demands and support, writing center administrators rely on archives to simultaneously maintain and remake their own institutions. We need to be able to tell stories about our *interpersonal* processes over time because they are at the heart of our meaning-making and, so, center-making. Archives can help us to tell these stories, to others and ourselves alike. But, as noted, they are troublesome.

Within writing center studies, Stacy Nall (2014) has treated especially cogently the difficulty and importance of archiving the events and nonevents of institutional life. She offers strong solutions, or at least steps toward solutions, in "Remembering Writing Center Partnerships: Recommendations for Archival Strategies." Nall suggests treating writing center archives, and especially archives of community engagement, as "dynamic constructions that WCDs [writing center directors] can proactively shape in order to ensure a sustainable institutional memory across generations of staff" (p. 102). She recommends building oral history repositories to tell "polyvocal stories about programmatic successes as well as challenges" (p. 110) as a way of really capturing "the dynamics of relationship building" (p. 112). It is, after all, "the complex relationship building that leads to effective program implementation and continuity" (p. 109). Understanding the processes of relationship-building that enable—and also sometimes limit—our community engagement processes is central to making those processes durable. To this end, Nall proposes "that through soliciting detailed staff and partner reflections, partnership correspondence and materials, and unpublished institutional scholarship, and placing and inventorying these in a centralized archive, WCDs can help ameliorate the loss of institutional memory that too often occurs during administrative and programmatic transitions" (p. 103). Such relational archives should allow writing centers to make themselves coherently across time and institutional flux.

This imperative is even more pressing when it comes to community partnerships, whether intra- or extra-university. A broader durability, as Lisa Zimmerelli & Victoria Bridges (2016) have noted, is an ethical obligation of community engagement work, especially where such work serves vulnerable communities. Zimmerelli & Bridges urge us to see "sustainability as an ethical imperative: if we were going to start the work, we wanted to ensure it continued" (p. 3). Underscoring the difficulty of achieving sustainability in service-learning contexts, however, Linda Adler-Kassner, Robert Crooks, & Ann Watters (1997) have articulated the mismatch between the temporalities of the university and of the community. They argue, for instance, that "class and term blocks can be a huge and even crippling obstacle" (p. 11) to community-based service-learning as a durable proposition. This concern is as relevant on campus as off, though the ethical stakes are not always quite as high. Especially for centers led by nine- or ten-month faculty, continuity of

partnerships within the university community means building relationships that bridge not only transitions from one leadership team to the next, but also relational gulfs imposed by winter and summer breaks. Concerns in tracking relationship-building processes, then, are with continuity and sustainability.

At the same time, sustainability cannot always mean continuity. The imperative to do justice to collaborative work often should cash out in regularized continuation of the work, but not always. As with writing itself, sometimes community engagement proceeds not in a lasting product, but in a changed way of being. In such cases, as indicated by our vignette about the MCC partnership, capturing the relational flows and nonevents of community engagement is one way of making meaning to harbor possibility for future moments of collaboration. That we will not always be able to build durable community engagement projects throws common readings of sustainability as continuity into question. As Paula Mathieu puts the proposition in Laurie Cella, Eli Goldblatt, Karen Johnson, Mathieu, Steve Parks, & Jessica Restaino (2016), what if "creating a relationship-based project that can and should grow slowly with people who have limited time to build that relationship … [were] an inherently unsustainable proposition?" (p. 47). Indeed, these authors maintain that "unpredictability, opportunity, and risk" will unavoidably mark community writing projects—at the heart of which is relationship-building (Cella, Goldblatt, Johnson, Mathieu, Parks, & Restaino, 2016, p. 42), inherently a fluid process. Given the potential faltering of even the most generative human relations (who has not witnessed a friendship's end?), the ethical imperative of sustainability must incorporate some way of loving and accepting the ephemeral.

Splitting the difference between Zimmerelli & Bridges and Cella, Goldblatt, Johnson, Mathieu, Parks, & Restaino, we see one role of archiving community engagement work as driving strategic planning. We work with the knowledge gained from relationship to relationship by emphasizing lessons of both successes and failures. This knowledge is as present in the shifting body of people moving through the center as it is "stored in our annual reports and shared files" (Bergmann, 2010, p. 174); archiving aims to capture still more of it. So far, so good. To say this, however, is not yet to distinguish flash archiving from other—we think, sincerely, richer—approaches to archiving, nor have we explained why we think this is, for at least some centers some of the time, a good-enough approach.

Flash archiving, to put it bluntly, is less work. Soliciting and cataloguing detailed staff and partner reflections, for instance, are without question great practices, but not feasible in all contexts. Flash archiving's more impressionistic goal is to capture the relational sense of a center iteratively and, thus, to aid in making and remaking that center over time. Writing centers are beset with more wonderful projects than can possibly ever be accomplished, so there

is a place for time-maximizing approaches. Flash archiving is time-efficient and makes archives as readily usable as possible for strategic planning at a glance as well as more intensive collective self-fashioning. Nall (2014) identifies a number of possible strategies, and we treat just one of these in terms of flash archiving: documenting the relationship-building processes that make community engagement possible.

It is helpful to have in mind Nall's larger picture, which includes archiving the nuances of community engagement and writing-across-the-curriculum work to remedy a lack of institutional memory about these aspects of the writing center's purpose and activities. For Nall, the point is that "institutional memories of relationship building, and their various challenges and compromises, are a particularly overlooked aspect of writing center histories and one for which WCDs might build a space in their documentation strategies" (p. 102). Relationship-building may be only one dimension of writing center work, but it deserves special attention. As Nall notes, "Because these interactions are rarely documented, they are likely occluded by writing center archives and thus risk being omitted from the body of knowledge transferred from one cycle of staff to the next" (p. 116). Nall's emphasis on the importance of capturing relational flows to understanding and making meaning of writing center work is, in our view, critical. The nonevents of writing center relationships are a drumbeat of both possibility and constraint, and to know ourselves we must have a sense of what these have been. Nall's systematic and thorough approach to archiving is the gold-standard resource for writing center archiving and capturing these nonevents.

Flash archiving, ultimately, is a tool for creating snapshots. What we offer here are notes on a process that, we want to be clear, is simply *not as good* as what Nall offers, taken from the standpoint of an archivist. For the writing center professional new to archiving, however, or for the person a bit overwhelmed by the demands of archiving well, flash archiving may be *good enough*. To offer a sense of how flash archiving can work and of the process-oriented takeaways that come out of it, we share more of the snapshots of the AUB writing center's off-campus collaboration with an NGO and snapshots from the AUC writing center's on-campus community partnerships. Metaphorically speaking: we are concerned not with literal photographs, but with relational gestalts captured primarily in sound and, still more, text.

Snapshots are, to many minds, not *proper* archives because snapshots catch so little. Above all, though, the snapshot is a medium of relation, a mesostrategy for capturing the flow of life. It freezes in time, for the senses, a gestalt of persons and objects in relation. Such a gestalt does not tell its own story; though worth ever so many words, no picture speaks on its own behalf. Rather, a snapshot is an inducement to storytelling, a flash of how things have been that prompts new narratives, and, thus, ongoing and reflective knowledge-making.

Flash archiving, understood as similar to taking a snapshot, invites thinking with and beyond institutional documentation needs. It produces material useful not only for annual reports, vital as those are, but also for the collaborative storytelling that enables relational continuity and repair as the leadership team and operating conditions of a writing center change over time. While perhaps not great archives, the snapshots remain useful for these purposes.

Flash archiving in theory and in practice. Flash archiving is a strategy for producing short, usably summarized oral histories with an emphasis on relationality. As such, it is an entry point into larger processes of archive building, a small instance of what Nall refers to when she observes that recording oral histories makes knowledge of past writing center work present (p. 112). Flash archiving can be undertaken by directors alone or collaboratively by tutors, writing specialists, administrators, clerical staff, and other writing center personnel involved in any or all community engagement efforts. Indeed, flash archiving is probably strongest when it incorporates members of the writing center across various institutional roles. Its utility lies in being a time-efficient way of preserving quick pictures of experience—community partners are our focus here, but this works for all sorts of relational dynamics and other nonevents. Certainly not intended to supplant other archiving practices, flash archiving is for writing centers that have not yet established a systematic archive, and who may not be in a position to follow archiving best practices.

Accordingly, while also responding to Kinkead's (2017) "documentation imperative," flash archiving falls under a separate strand of archiving practices from the Writing Center Research Project, International Writing Centers Association archives, and the National Archive of Composition and Rhetoric. As opposed to instituting repositories for future writing center research, a buildup of writing center lore and histories, or even preservation of theoretical or pedagogical material on composition, flash archiving leads to the creation of small-scale local archives. Such archiving is explicitly not research in the sense of 45 CFR 46, which uses decision trees to guide the implementation of human subjects research and institutional review boards in the United States and US-aligned institutions (see Office for Human Research Protections, 2019). Flash archiving neither aims to nor does produce generalizable knowledge. The emphasis instead is on keeping loose track of potentially meaningful interactions with community partners. As Kinkead (2017) argues, "[one's] individual history in writing centers parallels the larger social, cultural, and political changes. It's but one reason why such discrete narratives and histories matter" (p. 13). The difficulty is to get at such histories briefly, both as part-time archivist and as eventual user of the archive.

With that in mind, flash archiving does not attempt to undertake the strenuous, time-consuming, and potentially prohibitive process of documenting all interactions and partnerships, every meeting, or all outcomes.

While flash archiving could lead toward a comprehensive story of community partnerships, it responds to the documentation imperative by noting only moments or situations. As with a camera, which images get retained depends on who is holding it. Flash archiving foregrounds humanistic interpretation in its very development. As a strategy for producing, interpreting, and filing very brief oral histories, flash archiving is first and foremost about collaborative meaning-making. This aim is all the more reason to incorporate peer tutors, for instance, in periodic moments of flash archiving.

Our approach to flash archiving community partnership stories follows four steps, which take roughly an hour and may be repeated as often as is practical. This may easily be undertaken before, after, or as part of end-of-semester or year-end programming. A first step (1) is freewriting. Staff involved in collaboration between the writing center and potential or existing partnerships write for ten minutes about their community partners. Though our focus is on community partnerships, any given moment of flash archiving might orient toward another domain where nonevents are prevalent. In the case of flash archiving of community partnerships, before freewriting, staff should identify who of late are or were important community partners/partnerships for the writing center: on-campus and off-campus partners, organizations or institutions/agencies within/beyond the campus, individual persons or points of contact. Freewriting circles around the question of what makes these entities *important partners* for community engagement. This exercise is meant to be descriptive and impressionistic rather than comprehensive, capturing both information and attitudes. In the spirit of freewriting, participants concentrate on whichever partners most capture them in that moment. One of these partners will play a primary role in the construction of an oral history snapshot.

In a second step (2), tutors, staff, and/or administrators pair up (or form small groups) to interview one or more of each team, collecting oral histories for the center's repository. Interviewers begin by prompting interviewees to describe a significant conversation or moment of interaction with a community partner. Follow-up questions may pinpoint the significance of the partner or get at the status of the relationship at that moment. The interview proceeds in the writing center spirit of inquiry, i.e., in search of understanding and elaboration that follows the meaning-making process of the writer themselves (see viz., Eodice, Geller, & Lerner, 2017). Much as in a tutoring session, the purpose is to help an interviewee to elaborate on some experience of their choosing in ways that reflect their own preferred negotiation of constraint.[6] The product of this step is a 10- to 20-minute video or audio interview, focused on one or two particular partnerships. The snapshot hopes to capture both information about

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6   On the negotiation of constraint as characteristic rhetorical activity, see Ira Allen (2018).

and attitudes toward the process of developing a relationship with any one of the community partners listed.

Following the collection of these local oral histories, the third step (3) includes summative reflections on partnering with different communities or constituencies and the elaboration of pathways forward. One participant in the group or pair takes brief, declarative notes: full sentences vetted by partners in the exercise, well-spaced across a single digital or physical page. Participants reflect in conversation on inroads made, difficulties encountered, and successes experienced. Participants then outline what successful continuation of these partnerships might look like, what outcomes are hoped for in the coming year(s), and how the relationships built to date contribute to achieving those outcomes. The notes produced in this third stage are a guide to the archive and belong in it as well; the MCC vignette earlier in this essay comes from such notes.

Fourth (4) and finally, oral histories and reflection notes are filed. Participants upload video or audio of interviews and discussion notes to a shared drive (any appropriate digital repository), with files labeled by community partner and date of the exercise. As a center develops multiple community partnerships, the number of folders multiplies, each with evolving date ranges. The point of structuring the archive in this way is to maintain partnership as the orienting point of reference. There are many other ways of archiving, of course, some much fuller—but this one allows for the time-efficient and readily parseable collection of relational snapshots over time. At stake is the production of archives that will be usable, regardless of the waxing and waning of institutional fortunes. Having archived the history of her interactions on behalf of the writing center, for instance, a former AUC writing center director was later able to use these materials in designing a new capstone course on peer tutoring.

Such a good-enough archive leads to the creation of vertical as well as horizontal narratives. Examining folders based on community partners suggests connections across time between similar strands, areas of interest, or trends in collaborations. It can also lead to cross-collaborations between various mutually beneficial partnerships. At the same time, such an archive can highlight gaps in focus and thus the potential for new, underexplored partnerships. Also, a search for date ranges can yield an overview of noteworthy partnerships that the writing center initiated, maintained, or concluded during a specific time frame. For more macrolevel narration, such an archive offers materials for reporting on the activities of the center across time.

Flash archiving snapshots in practice from AUB and AUC. In AY 2015–2016, the administrative teams of the writing centers at AUB and AUC took the flash archiving approach above to create reflective accounts of selected community engagements, co-collecting and filing oral histories. The snapshots

below are brief reflective documents produced after listening back through our own recordings: stories about the snapshots generated from Step 3. Our aim in sharing these is to offer a sense of the textual documents or narratives allowed for by flash archiving. To apprehend what makes these archives "good enough," we contextualize these collaborations within the historical moments for each center. Our ability to provide this context, several years later, is enhanced by the archives themselves.

The AUB writing center collaborations recorded using flash archiving responded to a particular moment in the histories of the center, university, and country. In 2016, the writing center was undergoing a structural overhaul, establishing and strengthening internal collaborations with various student service units within the university. It deepened relations with the composition program and writing in the disciplines program while branching out more purposefully toward academic support services like the libraries and the accessibility office. This was in partial response to a university-wide focus on writing and communication skills. In parallel, the writing center moved more into the community, establishing relations with other centers to build an informal, countrywide, collaborative network. Also, given the refugee crisis, the writing center sought to provide support for migrants by expanding its partnerships in fulfillment of AUB's mission of supporting the peoples of the Middle East.

At the time the AUC administrative team started creating a flash archive, the center's partners were spread around the university and across disciplines. At each site, key to their experience has been the establishment of personal connections. In a US context, personal relationship-building with university staff is always encouraged, but often seen as optional. In the Arab world, it is critical. As a collectivist culture with a high power index, i.e., a high degree of social hierarchy, Egyptian attitudes permeate AUC and are highly influential on the relations established between the writing center and potential partners. An important part of the director's work was thus going personally to meet with support staff—not only faculty and leadership teams—in the various offices with which the center interacts, putting a face on the center's needs, requests, and offerings.

Snapshot from AUB. The snapshot below recounts the AUB writing center's outward-facing partnership with the Migrant Community Center, highlighting its initiation, progress, key moments of interaction, significant activities undertaken, troubleshooting processes, outcomes and projected outcomes, and their implications.

> MCC usefully challenges our usual peer-to-peer conversational model, which does not mesh smoothly with the disadvantaged economic and linguistic backgrounds of the target community. Being able to establish a strong relationship through more informal workshops based on roleplay, orality, narration, and free sharing of information at MCC

will allow the center—first the leadership team, and from there, the tutors—to deepen its capacities as a center for communicating effectively across difference and inequality. At the same time and most importantly, it helps the center meet AUB's mission of serving the peoples of Lebanon, the Middle East, and beyond.

In the meantime, MCC itself has been going through a restructuring process and relocating to new headquarters. When the center started the first series of workshops, and, after the first session, the director had to negotiate an unforeseen difficulty that arose when some of the students became anxious as they found the material too difficult although he had anticipated their proficiency level to be that of an advanced beginner in English. He adapted the material to their level and incorporated games and visualizations. With the lack of a textbook, the material selected had to be adapted to their context as migrant workers in Lebanon. Ways of overcoming their anxiety were to hold friendly conversations with them and share food and talk about common aspirations and hardships. They were able to push forward and develop more projects that could be sustained in the long run.

A successful partnership here would be one that is generative, putting the center in a position to find ever more ways to reach out to this community and other similar communities in the country. One outcome the center looks forward to is publication of the migrant workers' testimonials and the popular attention that may garner, all contributing to empowering the workers to find their voice through writing. This has potentially important cultural and even legal impacts in Lebanon, where migrant workers have extremely restricted access to the legal system. Another outcome is to further engage writing center tutors in community service and allow them to partner with writers along lines of difference. Other outcomes may come in the form of working with the migrant workers on other projects and learning to articulate their literacy needs in the workshops at the same time as empowering them to transcend subaltern positions in the community through writing.

One thing we find striking about this snapshot is that, for largely exogenous reasons, this collaboration foundered in subsequent years. As noted earlier, community engagement is not assured of long-term success. Productive relationships, even when carried forward effectively for some time, can give way in the face of budget cuts, shifting institutional priorities, and changing legal and historical landscapes. We share this snapshot *not* to celebrate our center's successful community engagement (though it was for a time successful and helped in that by our archiving), but rather to highlight the importance of capturing relationship-building *in situ*. Flash archiving offers a way of getting

at latticeworks of relations even while building them, the better to sustain our learning—and our capacities for building—in uncertain futures.

Snapshot from AUC. The following snapshot overviews on-campus partnerships recast through the director's reflections on their emergence, the components necessary for continuation, and the possibility of initiating new collaborations. As with the previous snapshot, at stake is a way of retaining and learning from evanescent experiences of connection. The director combines the cultural with the communal and institutional to foreground human interactions and the role of staff in weaving the net of her writing center's partnerships.

One notable program that the writing center at AUC has supported is the Lazord Academy, which, as part of AUC's John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement's programs, "empowers select AUC students and young civil society leaders by offering them guided opportunities to expand their skills in ethical leadership, civic engagement and strategic philanthropy." The writing center has provided a series of workshops for Lazord and one on "writing for social justice" in particular. In that process, staff at Lazord have begun seeing the writing center as a key partner not only for developing language skills, as was their initial assumption, but [also] for helping students develop as whole persons. In parallel, establishing new relationships with support staff in the Office of Student Services at the School of Business has highlighted the differences in writer interactions in that technically specific context. Providing a series of one-hour workshops (during the daily assembly) on presentation skills, intercultural communication, and business writing has created new opportunities for interaction not only with students, but with a group of staff members who work with undergraduate students in a very different way than faculty.

Ultimately, the director has found that working to develop a partnership between the writing center and the AUC community is contingent upon the director's interpersonal relationships with members of that community at all levels. She has come to realize that for the writing center to be a go-to resource on campus, where students come to find a variety of kinds of assistance, friendly relationships with AUC staff are critical. The latter help her conduct a proactive campaign of regularly publicizing the writing center through weekly electronic blasts to students, email notices on Blackboard and in the news@auc online newsletter, along with monthly displays of large posters on campus tripods and bridges. Staff, important members of the AUC community, have an intimate knowledge of the functioning of the university that many faculty members and most students do not, and staff can help accomplish the outreach the writing center needs most at present. In fact, many of the writing center partnerships have come about through

the arrangements of the staff and are sometimes requested by staff only. Though workshops are also requested by faculty and students, it is the staff who arrange them.

Recently the center has been working with two key offices at the university: one is the communications office, working with them on the new web site. The other office is University Academic Computing Services. The director liaised with them on the online internal scheduling system. Recently, with the two new initiatives of Arabic and Public Speaking tutoring, writing center staff had to take training on a new scheduling software program. Good relations with tech people are very important for the functioning and continuity of the AUC writing center. Continuing to visit key staff members and develop ongoing relationships with them is crucial to the center's community engagement strategy for the coming year.

For AUC's writing center, what emerged in this flash archiving exercise is a sense of interdependence with stakeholders at sites within the university that status-focused faculty and administrators do not always attend to sufficiently. This snapshot story highlights the importance of classified staff not only to the center's daily operations, but also to its growth and possibilities of future collaboration.

Flash Archiving Can Do a Lot, But It Can't Do Everything. Documenting relationship-building processes as they unfold, in our experience, aids in the flourishing of community engagement in general. But it cannot guarantee permanence in particular. It is all the more important, then, for snapshots to capture potential lines of growth, multiple relevant actors, and nonevent moments. When some components of a process are preserved as a *sense of things*, the mechanism can be reinvented. Flash archiving is useful beyond the creation of a static repository of stories, building instead on the potential for recursive dynamic interaction. Since each of the accounts shared here took (in its rough form) roughly an hour to create, we think it is fruitful to see flash archiving as a good-enough approach to creating archives. Such an approach is sustainable in the long run, even for writing center administrators working under intensive time and resource constraints, and it facilitates both continuity and novel institutional meaning-making.

If we want an orientation toward community partnerships to last, and to outlast specific engagement moments, it has to become part of a writing center's well-grounded story of self. As Bergmann (2010) notes, based on observations by Eli Goldblatt & Steve Parks, tying engagement to research is "a necessary means of establishing and maintaining long-term relationships between university programs and community institutions" (p. 171). As research in the soft sense, that is, ongoing inquiry into our own institutional conditions of existence and characteristic activities, flash archiving adds interpretive

stories to oral histories and files them together. Covering ever-longer time periods, this approach promises increasingly rich reflection on, and therefore possibilities for, community engagement.

At stake is reflection upon what and who we want our centers to be and how we wish to be in relation with others. Providing opportunities for documenting, narrating, and reflecting on the interactions within community engagement, flash archiving helps to preserve and cultivate the nuances of this engagement in much the way proposed by Nall. The state of collaborations at a given moment relative to past moments, whether further pursued or abandoned, factors into reflexive interpretation of snapshot stories as part of an ongoing narrative. We are who we say our archives tell us we are, over time. Archiving processes, whether the flash archiving suggested here or others, pave the way toward remediating what Nall (2014) has rightly decried as a common "lack of institutional memory" (p. 117).

This problem, in turn, points us toward greater reflexivity—especially in the digital age. The complexity of any digital archive lies in the "production, circulation, and effects of [the] different artifacts produced at different moments in time and combined through digitization into a single object" (Rawson, 2013, p.7). Engaging in an ongoing way with the markers of our relationality, whether events or nonevents, attunes us to the character of the archives we create and offers iterative opportunities for collective self-fashioning. We produce, ultimately, not only video or audio recordings of oral histories and written notes thereon, but also a filing location and assortment of metadata that makes of the whole a digital object—and so, ever-new stories of the writing center that made that aggregative object. Every filing system creates opportunities for analysis and interpretation. The chief advantage of flash archiving is that, as a good-enough method, it invites us to archive *often*. For some centers, lowering the bar for what we ask of an archive—seeking merely to produce reflective snapshots—clears a barrier to begin the process of digital archiving.

Flash archiving addresses some concerns that accompany the momentous task of documentation, namely time, sustainability, use, and effort relative to long-term outcome. At the same time, this strategy admittedly has limitations at the level of storage and consistency, institutional validity, and comprehensiveness. The first difficulty with storage is devising and maintaining the archiving system at a technical level, so that it remains accessible over multiple administrations in a way that is clearly incorporated into their evolving purposes. Second, while reflective snapshots can mesh with internal research and reporting practices, for institutional reports, such snapshots need to be translated into bankable documents crucial for funding and supporting current and future collaborations. Finally, lacking comprehensiveness by definition, flash archives reflect only some collaborations and those only partially. Flash archives may be rendered useful for assessment, but they are not immediately

for that purpose. Still, by reducing the upfront cost of creating archives, this approach allows for better capture of nonevents. It allows for different ways of narrating the interplay between individual actors and relational flows, opening the door to ever more rhetorically framed big-picture-in-the-making knowledge about, and strategic interventions into, our own practices and aims (Belk, 2018).

Some epistemological considerations. Rather than an anxious effort to keep up with the world, flash archiving is conversational, episodic, overlapping, and subjective. As a form of institutional knowledge-making, it is aleatory. Creating snapshots of nonevents mirrors the inner workings and processes of the writing center as a critically collaborative space. The conversational basis of both processes transforms events and nonevents into statements in the Foucauldian sense. A statement, as Foucault has it, is a proposition that

> neither the language . . . nor the meaning can quite exhaust. . . . [I]t is linked to the gesture of writing . . . [I]t opens up to itself a residual existence . . . in the materiality of manuscripts, books, or any other form of recording; . . . like every event, it is unique, yet subject to repetition, transformation, and reactivation. (Foucault, 1972, p. 28)[7]

Flash archiving, like a writing center session, produces statements more than conclusions. That which emerges is inducement to further fruitful discourse.

Writing center collaborators operate on living statements as communities of practice in the Wengerian sense articulated by Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet (2006). Knowledge (re)creation results from "genuine moments of collaboration" (p. 8), in which prior instances of discourse open onto new possibilities. That same "living experience of negotiating meaning" (p. 8) that Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet (2006) draw on Wenger to evoke is enabled by the reflection-in-action of flash archiving. In creating oral history snapshots that, though by definition less fulsome than might be wished, are *good enough*, we read together potentially asynchronous, incomplete, or conflicting situations in our practices of community engagement. The resulting archive is created less as an essential reference for an anticipated posterity and more as a contribution to reflexively developing continuity. Weaving together partial stories about impressionistically chosen interstitial moments is how we become ourselves, both as individuals and as institutions.

As an activity characteristic of writing centers, flash archiving enacts the injunction to "write together" that shapes writing center tutoring, tutor-writer relations, and tutoring frameworks. The result is an index of sorts to that fluid corpus of knowledge contained within shifting practices and moving bodies. Flash archiving moves beyond a necessary, but often insufficient, focus on

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7   We are indebted to Ann Laura Stoler's reading of Foucault on minor histories and nonevents (2010, p. 7).

logistics and the countable as elements of writing center administration, to invite collaborative creation of the writing center's knowledge of itself. At the same time, it is pragmatically quick to accomplish. Writing centers are in a constant state of negotiating their being as simultaneously a little more than and a little less than institutionally desired. Writing center archives thus emerge as Roland Barthes's "'storeyed' archival field[s] in both senses of the term: *layered* and *crafted* from practical and . . . [un]acceptable or discarded knowledge" (Stoler, 2010, p. 22). Flash archiving mirrors knowledge-making as the de facto outcome of writing center practice: attuned to ephemera in the midst of solving real-world writing dilemmas. As such, flash archiving illustrates how the writing center as a community of practice can constitute "shared histor[ies] of learning" (Wenger as cited in Geller, Eodice, Condon, Carroll, & Boquet, 2006, p. 50). Creating transferrable records of nonevents in the service of collaborative self-fashioning offers scope for writing center self-knowledge across administrations and contexts, both within and "against" institutional narratives of success and failure.

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